

2015 essay prompts

Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant

Anne Tyler

(Note that these prompts all can be broken down into smaller parts, usually marked by a question. Address the ENTIRE prompt for a better score. Each prompt also asks you to interpret and observe beyond what Tyler simply tells you about the characters. Push your thinking. Evaluate and synthesize, draw conclusions and analyze . . . The greatest impact on your grade for this assignment lies not just in proving that you've read, but in proving that you've thought too!)

One more thing: After your essay has a score using the criteria on the rubric, you'll lose 5 points if you do not cite the title of the book (correctly marked) AND the full name of the author in the introduction. You'll lose another 5 if you do not cite your quotes or if you do not cite them in exact MLA style. These are EASY fixes—ones that other people can help you with if you aren't sure how to do them. At this point of the year, you shouldn't even need this reminder!

CHOOSE ONE!

1. JENNY

Everyone knows Ezra is Pearl's favorite, but she seems so proud of Cody and eager for his presence at home. How Pearl feels about Jenny is less clear, though. She is hypercritical of Jenny, especially concerning Jenny's appearance. In the stories of Pearl's "rampages," Jenny often takes the brunt of her mother's anger and her abuse even though her brothers seem to do things that are more harmful or offensive. And when Pearl reacts to Jenny kissing Josiah—and later to the very thought of Jenny talking to Josiah—her wild assumptions and cruel words are extreme. Why Jenny? Why does Pearl criticize and react to Jenny so particularly, so strong? Finally, despite this special anger Pearl reserves for Jenny, Jenny's relationship with Pearl at the end seems reasonable and calm. How did this happen?

2. CODY

Cody lashes out at Ezra and Pearl, trying to make them suffer when he feels angry, hurt, or jealous. However, just a brief analysis of Cody's behavior suggests his real anger is toward Beck. Where and when in the novel is this true source of Cody's anger clear? Why would Cody be especially angry toward Beck, more than the other children? Most importantly, how do the events at the end of the novel begin to heal Cody's hurt toward his father? Address events from both chapters 8 and 10 specifically.

3. EZRA

When the book ends, Jenny is the mother of eight children and the wife of a man who seems to adore, admire, and respect her—oh yeah, he loves her too. Cody's marriage and his relationship with his son are still tricky; however, there has been much more honesty, communication, and a sense of hope among them as a family in the last two chapters. Both of these siblings wonder about how Ezra will cope now that Pearl is dead. Ezra has no wife, no children, and he has lost the one responsibility and personal connection he had with his mother's death. Even so, Ezra does not seem anxious or lonely. Why not? Focus on WHY this might be true for Ezra based on what you know about him and his life. (His basic personality is *part* of it, but no one's life is that simple—it is an insufficient answer to say he simply *is* that way.)